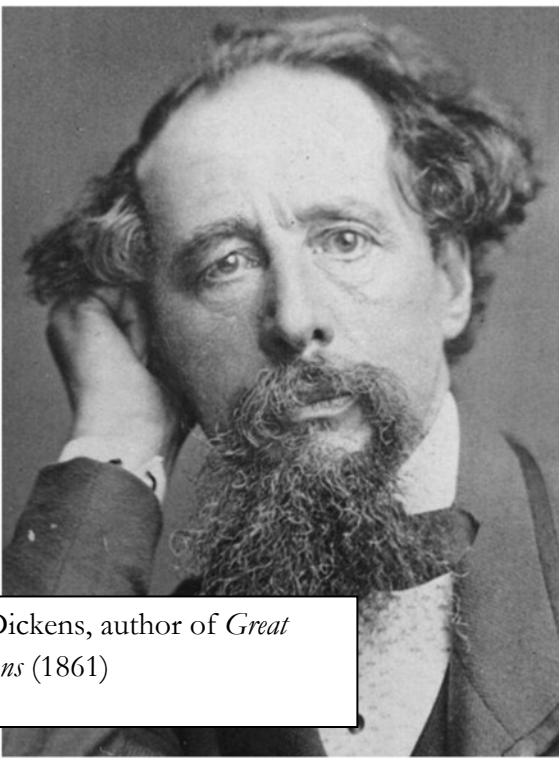


## JACK MAGGS AS POSTCOLONIAL NOVEL?

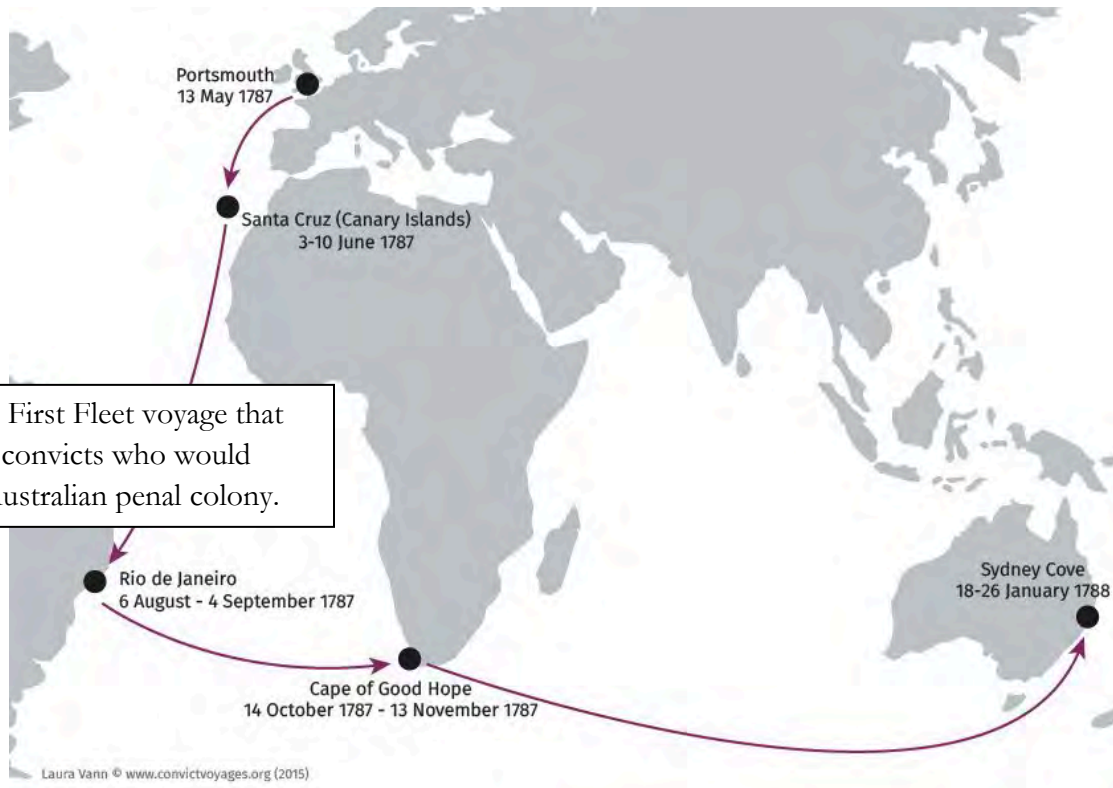


Charles Dickens, author of *Great Expectations* (1861)

Peter Carey, author of *Jack Maggs* (1997)



In what ways does Peter Carey's novel *Jack Maggs* seem to be a revision or response to Charles Dickens' novel *Great Expectations*? What similarities of plot, characterization and style do you see between the novels?



Map of the First Fleet voyage that carried the convicts who would settle the Australian penal colony.

## TIMELINE

- 1606 – First Europeans, Dutch, explore Australia (western territory) but make no territorial claims
- 1770 – James Cook explores Australian's eastern coastline, claiming the land for England as New South Wales
- 1775 - American War of Independence begins, disrupting use of American colonies for penal purposes
- 1783 - American War of Independence ends; America becomes free republic
- 1788 - The penal colony of New South Wales is founded
- 1861 - *Great Expectations* published
- 1862 - Transportation to Australia ends entirely
- 1901 - Australian colonies federate to become self-governing Commonwealth of Australia
- 1942 - Australia adopts Statute of Westminster, ending authority of British legislation in Australia
- 1997 - *Jack Maggs* published

“Is it, Sir? I suppose it is. As for me, I had an older sister who suffered transportation to that same cursed place... God help us all, that Mother England would do such a thing to one of her own” (88-89).

“I am not of that race.” “What race?” “The Australian race,” he said. “The race of Australians.” “But what of your babes?” “Damn you, don’t look at me like that. I am an Englishman” (312-313).

Carey, Peter. *Jack Maggs: A Novel*. Kindle ed., Knopf Doubleday, 1999.

- How do these passages evoke sympathy for those sentenced to transportation? What do these passages suggest about the value of Australian identity vs English identity?

## MAPPING, COLONIAL POWER STRUGGLES AND AUTHORITY

At night, Mr Buckle, I walk the city. I walk down past your old shop in Clerkenwell, down into Limehouse, back up through your dreadful Seven Dials. Wally Duke’s. The Hopping Toad. The Sheaf of Barley. I have them all here inside my cranium. But what you have brought me here is a world as rich as London itself. What a puzzle of life exists in the dark little lane-ways of this wretch’s soul, what stolen gold lies hidden in the vaults beneath his filthy streets.” [...] “It’s the Criminal Mind” said Tobias Oates, “awaiting its first cartographer.” (90)

Carey, Peter. *Jack Maggs: A Novel*. Kindle ed., Knopf Doubleday, 1999.

“I blame myself for the way I withheld my true history from you. I left a blank map for you and you have doubtless filled it with your worst imaginings” (238).

Carey, Peter. *Jack Maggs: A Novel*. Kindle ed., Knopf Doubleday, 1999.

Both literally and metaphorically, maps and mapping are dominant practices of colonial and post-colonial cultures. Colonization itself is often consequent on a voyage of 'discovery', a bringing into being of 'undiscovered' lands. The process of discovery is reinforced by the construction of maps, whose existence is a means of textualizing the spatial reality of the other, naming or in almost all cases, renaming spaces in a symbolic and literal act of mastery and control. In all cases the lands so colonized are literally reinscribed, written over, as the names and languages of the indigenes are replaced by new names or corrupted into new and Europeanized forms by the cartographer and the explorer. [...] Maps also inscribe their ideology in territory in numerous ways other than place-names. The blank space of early maps signify a literal *terra nullius*, an open and inviting (virginal) space into which the European imagination can project itself and into which the European (usually male explorer) must penetrate. (26).

Ashcroft, Bill, Gareth Griffiths and Helen Tiffin. *Post-Colonial Studies: The Key Concepts*. Routledge, 2000.

- What does Tobias Oates' use of the metaphor of the uncharted space reveal about the state of his relationship to Jack Maggs?
- How is the process of fiction-writing presented through the use of the metaphor of cartography? As a postcolonial author, what might Peter Carey be suggesting about the ethical nature of how writers in the metropole have represented characters who are colonized or representative of the colonized?

[Tobias Oates] was by now convinced that this was the last novel he would ever publish. He wrote full-steam, brazenly, daring Jack Maggs to turn around and snatch his book again. At the crossroads at Wallingford he wrote the famous line with which, thirty years later, *The Death of Maggs* would finally begin...(231)

Carey, Peter. *Jack Maggs: A Novel*. Kindle ed., Knopf Doubleday, 1999.

[Jack Maggs] had had that feeling in his gut before, that cold terror associated with the triangle. He knew his life and death were not his own. His forehead creased in a grid of criss-crossed frown marks. He turned the page. Jack Maggs is a criminal who presumes to come home from Banishment, who, having accrued great wealth, buys the great mansion in which he will finally be burned alive (273).

Carey, Peter. *Jack Maggs: A Novel*. Kindle ed., Knopf Doubleday, 1999.

- In what ways does Jack Maggs show himself to be a writer? Look at Maggs' narration and letters. How literary is his style? Do we see him using language story-telling techniques imaginatively? Does he use rhetorical language? Does he seem to narrate events merely to communicate what happens as quickly as possible, or does he seem to take some creative pleasure in narration?
- How does Maggs resist and subvert the exploitative storytelling that Oates intends for him? Does he have agency in his relationship with Oates, or is he powerless?